

§ 7A-38.5. Community mediation centers.

(a) The General Assembly finds that it is in the public interest to encourage the establishment of community mediation centers, also known as dispute settlement centers or dispute resolution centers, to support the work of these centers in facilitating communication, understanding, reconciliation, and settlement of conflicts in communities, courts, and schools, and to promote the widest possible use of these centers by the courts and law enforcement officials across the State. A center may establish and charge fees for its services other than for criminal court mediations. Fees for criminal court mediation are set forth in G.S. 7A-38.7, and centers and mediators shall not charge any other fees in such cases.

(b) Community mediation centers, functioning as or within nonprofit organizations and local governmental entities, may receive referrals from courts, law enforcement agencies, and other public entities for the purpose of facilitating communication, understanding, reconciliation, and settlement of conflicts.

(c) Each chief district court judge and district attorney shall encourage mediation for any criminal district court action pending in the district when the judge and district attorney determine that mediation is an appropriate alternative.

(d) Each chief district court judge shall encourage mediation for any civil district court action pending in the district when the judge determines that mediation is an appropriate alternative.

(e) Except as provided in this subsection and subsection (f) of this section, each chief district court judge and district attorney shall refer any misdemeanor criminal action in district court that is generated by a citizen-initiated arrest warrant or criminal summons to the local mediation center for resolution, except for (i) any case involving domestic violence; (ii) any case in which the judge or the district attorney determine that mediation would be inappropriate; or (iii) any case being tried in a county in which mediation services are not available. The mediation center shall have 45 days to resolve each case and report back to the court with a resolution. The district attorney shall delay prosecution in order for the mediation to occur. If the case is not resolved through mediation within 45 days of referral, or if any party declines to enter into mediation, the court may proceed with the case as a criminal action. For purposes of this section, the term "citizen-initiated arrest warrant or criminal summons" means a warrant or summons issued pursuant to G.S. 15A-303 or G.S. 15A-304 by a magistrate or other judicial official based upon information supplied through the oath or affirmation of a private citizen.

(f) Any prosecutorial district may opt out of the mandatory mediation under subsection (e) of this section if the district attorney files a statement with the chief district court judge declaring that subsection shall not apply within the prosecutorial district.

(g) Nothing in this section is intended to prohibit or delay the appointment or engagement of an attorney for a defendant in a criminal case. (1999-354, s. 1; 2011-145, s. 31.24(b); 2012-194, s. 63.3(a); 2016-107, s. 8.)